

CONNECT FOR LIFE

2023

Annual

Report



Charity No. 1171169



“ I have spent my life being shy. Here at CFL I am not, you’ve all brought me out of myself.” – a service user



Words from our Chair

Frances Arnall

Seven years on . . .

In life sometimes it's about asking the right questions. If I had asked Alison when we began what Connect for Life (CFL) might look like, I'm not sure that her response would reflect what we have become. It never ceases to amaze me the evolution of CFL over the last year let alone the last 7 years.

The journey has not always been easy, and I want to pay tribute and express my sincere thanks to all those people who work tirelessly on a voluntary basis, giving huge amounts of time, thought, and planning to give our service users the most amazing hours of fun and care and the carers a well-earned break week in & week out. Without this incredible support CFL would not be what it is.

I'm also humbled by the support that we have received this year from relatives of service users and other organisations who have heard of our work and who have supported us financially so that we can continue to buy in activities and resources for our sessions. This year we have invested in more administrative support for the team which has been invaluable.

This last year has been free of any Covid restrictions, however, the impact of Covid remains apparent. We have welcomed several new service users who have continued to experience social isolation as well as memory difficulties. In addition, the pattern of the length of time people are with us continues to be more variable, than pre-Covid. What continues to remain the same is the experience people have when they are with us, it continues to be a safe, welcoming, caring environment in which they can enjoy stimulation activities and build friendships.

This past year we have also started a new venture Active Cogs. This is a bi-weekly 6 week rolling programme of cognitive stimulation for people concerned about their memory. Based on the evidence of improving the memory with both physical exercise as well as mental exercise, the group is slowly building and creating its own identity. There has certainly been a lot of interest in the group and we shall see how it develops over the next 12 months.

Someone asked a few months ago whether there was a vision for rolling out CFL nationwide! Certainly not came the reply, however we remain more than happy to share our experiences with anyone who wishes to develop a similar group in their local area.

Recognising that none of what we have achieved over the last 12 months would have been possible without our brilliant, enthusiastic and committed co-ordinator, our team of volunteers and administration a huge thank you goes to them.

If you know of someone who may benefit from our sessions go to our website or facebook page to contact us. If you are keen to know more about joining us as a volunteer you can do so via the website or facebook page.

Sincerely,

Frances Arnall

Frances Arnall

Chair of the Trustees



Co-ordinator's Comments

Alison Humphreys

Quote from the book '*Leisure and Everyday Life with Dementia*'

"My hope is that those reading it will learn the importance of listening to people like me who are living with a diagnosis of dementia – to involve us in a safe and supportive environment, finding our way to enjoy leisure, being in the moment, with choice and communication at its heart."

Jane Twigg (living with dementia)

'Connect For Life'

These three words were chosen for a reason, the hope being that as a charity we could provide a place where people could meet others and build connections that would enhance their feelings of wellbeing. Seven years on and these words have taken on even more meaning:

Connect – the dictionary definition - 'bring together or into contact so that a real link is established'

We have seen this happening in our day support sessions, newcomers starting with low confidence and some anxieties, feelings often associated with dementia and memory difficulties, blossoming into confident people walking into the room with a smile and a cheery 'Good Morning', recognising and greeting others. Everyone has the opportunity to be heard, to join in our lively discussions and everyone does in the way they feel able to.

Connections lead to relationships

Relationships lead to friendships

Friendships lead to a feeling of community

A feeling of community leads to a sense of belonging.

The Connect For Life community feels safe, people who attend (in their own words) feel "content", "happy", "warm" and "love it".

We are only sharing in a small part of the lives of our service users, a few hours a week and a few years or months of their life as a whole but those moments we share with them are very precious and all of us in the team feel privileged to be sharing this part of their life journey.

Active Cogs is a new aspect to our service, providing a space for anyone worried about their memory to meet with others, discuss topics and how they relate to memory changes, stimulate brain and body and usually have a laugh along the way.

The Connect For Life team is absolutely amazing and has developed, particularly over the last year, so that my role is so much easier. I would like to thank every member of the team, each bringing their own gifts, skills and personality and willingly sharing them with all our service users. It is their combined effort that enables people to feel safe, listened to, respected and that they matter.

It feels good to take time to briefly look back and look forward to the future but really important to celebrate where Connect For Life is today, living in the moment is the way many people with dementia have to live so we aim to keep making those moments we share with them very meaningful and special.

Sincerely,

Alison Humphreys

Alison Humphreys

Project Co-ordinator



Connect For Life

Meet our Board of Trustees

Frances Arnall
Chair of the Trustees



Alison Humphreys
Project co-ordinator



Jenny Jones



Julia Thomas



Sam Teare



Chelsea Davies



Connect For Life

Values, Mission & Purpose

Our continuing vision is to provide more of our high quality day support for Oswestry and the surrounding area.



We want to enhance an individual's sense of well being, giving them opportunities to meet with others and build connections that will help them feel valued and listened to.

Our Purpose

- **Meaningful experiences**
- **Enriching lives**



Connect For Life

Our Impact in Numbers

We had another really successful year supporting people with dementia, their carers and families. Here are just some of the figures showing how we helped to make sure our service users and their families did not face dementia alone in 22/23 . . .

2,200 hours of stimulating day support provided which results in an equal amount of respite time for carers too!



28 service users regularly attending the weekly sessions

Approximate volunteer hours = 6,486



Since starting the group sessions every Thursday my mum has been able to meet likeminded people and socialise in different ways, she enjoys the variety of topics which is different each week and also enjoys the lovely hot meals that are supplied.

It is a real pleasure to see how much it benefits mum and wonderful to hear how her day went and the memories it makes and gives her something to talk about with not just me but other friends as well - a carer's comment

Connect For Life

Service User's Comments

"I have spent my life being shy. Here at CFL I am not, you've all brought me out of myself."

"I wouldn't miss it, we're all good friends where people are interested."

"I enjoy sharing the memories"

"A place to be happy, sing and dance. I love you all."

"I love coming to CFL where I can be myself"

"I've been coming to CFL from the beginning I'm still here so I must be enjoying it!"

"I get so lonely it's lovely to get out and meet people, chat and laugh."

Connect For Life

Carer's Comment

The following has been kindly provided by Julie and Barrie. In their own words they describe the important role **Connect For Life** plays in their lives as carers for someone with dementia . . .



Betty attends Connect For Life on Wednesdays and has been for over 6 years, making her one of the longest attendees.

The period on a Wednesday when Betty is in attendance gives Barrie and myself a much needed break and a taste of normality.

Betty enjoys the company of her fellow service users, and also the company and care of all the lovely volunteers, their help and support is invaluable.

The huge variety of activities provided by connect for Life is outstanding, from afternoon teas, Christmas parties, singing, animal farm pets. These activities stimulate her and give her an overall sense of achievement and wellbeing. A huge amount of thought and planning goes into preparing these activities for the users.

The food provided is nutritious and healthy which Betty thoroughly enjoys, she has a very good appetite

Betty, Barrie, and myself enjoy the routine of Betty's attendance to Connect for Life it gives a structure to her week.

In conclusion when Betty leaves at 2.30 on a Wednesday afternoon she describes her time at Connect for Life as excellent .

We thank you for all the care love and support extended to Betty along with all the other service users.



CONNECT FOR LIFE - 2022/2023

A Coronation Celebration, Choirs, Crafts,
Community, oh and Chinchillas . . .

They say that variety is the spice of life and at Connect For Life weekly support sessions that is certainly the case. Our service users continued to enjoy a wide variety of workshops, singing sessions, visiting guests, celebrations and more.



In May, as the whole country was celebrating we held our own Coronation Party that was fit for a King! Cake, coronets, and crowns ensured that much fun was to be had.

We love to get up and dance here at Connect For Life. Studies have shown that people who exercise regularly are less likely to experience heart disease and stroke, both factors that are associated with an increased risk of developing dementia.





Our craft sessions require service users to use coordination, imagination and dexterity which always results in a room alive with happy chatter.

It's important for people living with dementia to keep an active mind and continue to have a sense of fun. Keeping them focused on a task or puzzle for an extended period of time helps people to engage.

One of the best ways to keep an active mind is through playing games.



The map we are creating is a timeline of places, pets and memories from the lives of our service users.

Conversations about the past can allow our service users to reminisce about past holidays or places they used to live.

We have been treated to a wide variety of musical appearances this year . . .

Musicians from near and afar have kept us entertained with an eclectic mix of songs and music.

Music memories often remain in the brain even as language and other memories disappear.



We've had visits from lots of interesting people including the High Sheriff of Shropshire, local historians, belly dancers, and we've even had the opportunity to sit in a Bentley.

Our visitors all bring something different and special to our sessions.



From donkeys to dachshunds, chinchillas to spiders, snakes to rabbits - our service users had the opportunity to get up close with some of our animal friends. We are a brave bunch - stroking scorpions is not for the faint hearted!

Connect For Life

Volunteer Comments

“

I started volunteering with Connect For Life as part of my work experience placement with college in 2017. Before I started, I was apprehensive having seen only very dull and sad day centres. However, as soon as I stepped in for the first time, I knew that CFL was completely different. Everything they do is entirely centred around the service users. Their happiness and wellbeing are their top priority. The atmosphere at CFL is always happy, warm, and bright even on the darkest, coldest, and rainiest days.

There is so much care, love, and passion that goes into every session. The volunteers are there because they want to be, and it really shows. We are all so happy to be there with one another. It is so wonderful being a part of the team at CFL. Everyone has a kind, compassionate, and caring nature. We are all great friends at CFL, and I love spending time with everyone.

I love seeing how much joy, happiness, and pleasure the service users get out of the sessions. It is so heart-warming to see the close and meaningful friendships blossom between service users. They look forward to seeing each other every week -
Chelsea



“

My mother has advanced Alzheimer's and having worked with dementia sufferer's professionally, I was attracted to Connect For Life's ethos. However, I did hesitate before applying to volunteer. Would I be useful, would I be overwhelmed and could I commit? But from my very first visit I have not looked back.

I have found a place full of laughter, friendship and joy. Everyone is treated as individuals, and whether we are service users or volunteers, our "uniqueness" is respected and valued. We are a family, a safe space where we can all be ourselves.

Yes, there can be challenges, but being part of a team means we are all supported. Connect For Life volunteers demonstrate commitment week in, week out, ensuring that the group has a future.

I am so glad and honoured to volunteer at Connect For Life, applying to join was one of the best decisions I ever made -
June



Active Cogs

Our First Year



Active Cogs was set up to provide bi-weekly support to people who may be noticing some form of memory loss. Research suggests a combination of physical and mentally stimulating activities can help slow down the rate of memory loss.

Sessions are based around one of the following six 'themes' - Physical Health, Mental Health, Sleep/Rest, Managing Memory, Diet/Food and Staying Safe at Home.

In its first year, **Active Cogs** has gone from strength to strength. Sessions have been well received and we plan to build on this in the coming year.

Active Cogs is based at Gatacre Pavilion and sessions are held every other Monday from 1:30pm to 3:30pm. For further details please visit our Facebook page (search for **Active Cogs**) or visit the Connect For Life website for dates and themes of sessions. www.connectforlife.co.uk/activecogs



Before my mum joined connect for life she felt quite isolated due to her disability. She retired earlier than planned and many of her friends and family were still working.

Once she started cogs you could see the difference in her mood. She always talks about what she has been up to which other members were there and what is planned for next week.

She enjoys all the activities especially anything musical and is always telling family about the activities. As some weeks have themes mum will come home and do her homework on looking for photos or researching a theme, she's always thrown herself in 100% to any activity she can.

Knowing mum isn't sitting at home everyday is a relief to me and and it's nice to know she feels comfortable with the other members and the staff at connect for life and really enjoys the Wednesday and Monday groups - a carer's comment

Active Cogs

Volunteer's Comments



Active Cogs was a totally new concept when I joined the group and so the ensuing 12 months has seen it grow and evolve to what it is today.

We started with a basic plan of six key topics – Physical Health, Mental Health, Diet and Food, Sleep and Rest, Managing Memory and Staying Safe at Home – whilst also having a physical exercise element and relaxation / breathing exercises. We all research the topics and bring our ideas to the sessions with a mixture of discussion and quizzes to make it as inclusive as possible. As the group grew we changed our format having observed the positive effect of some physical activity before we start the discussions.

I have noticed how important these sessions are to the carers as well as the Service Users. What is particularly touching is that I was told by one of the couples that Active Cogs is the only place he will go to out of the home as he feels safe and confident to be with us. This makes what we are doing so worthwhile.

In all I have found my time volunteering with Active Cogs to be very fulfilling. In researching certain topics, I too have learnt things and it is lovely to share thoughts and ideas with others. We have also laughed together, which is so important in life. Having led some short sessions of singing and rhythm I am hoping to build on that in the coming year as music is a proven positive key for the health of people living with memory problems.

Alison McLauchlan (Active Cogs volunteer)



Connect For Life Events & Appearances

We have been fortunate to receive invitations to some really amazing events this year, here are some of the highlights:

- Our young volunteers won Oswestry Life Magazine's 'Young Volunteer of the Year' award
- Alison and Sue gave a talk for Oswestry Cambrian Rotary
- Inspiring the next generation, Rosy and Sue spoke to students at North Shropshire College about what the charity does
- Alison was a guest on the Lanyon Bowdler podcast where she discussed the benefit of Connect For Life sessions.
- The Mayor, on behalf of Oswestry Town Council, presented Connect For Life with an award in recognition of exceptional service

And we are Nominees for the King's Award for Voluntary Service - we are currently waiting to hear the outcome!



**The King's Award
for Voluntary Service**



Connect For Life

Our Volunteers



Regular Day Support Volunteers (Connect For Life)

Alison Humphreys (Co-ordinator)
Frances Arnall
Marian Baskerville
Joan Bickford
Phil Brown
Joy Connell
Rosy Davidson
Chelsea Davies
June Edwards
Sue Hibbert
Glenys Lawrence

Alison McLauchlan
Jacqui Mullings
Richard Peace (now left to attend Uni)
Jenny Rogers
Daphne Taylor
Julia Thomas
Sam Teare
Vicky Vagg (Glyndwr Uni placement)
Paula Zielinski

Active Cogs Support Volunteers

Frances Arnall
Rosy Davidson
Greg Farrier
Sue Hibbert
Hannah Hughes
Alison Humphreys
Alison McLauchlan

Occasional Volunteers

Imogen Hibbert
Tudor Humphreys
Jenny Jones
Jess Wilkinson (6th form student)

Finance - Admin - Governance - Fundraising

IT Support - Dan Jones
Grant Fundraising - Tudor Humphreys
Trustees - Alison Humphreys, Frances Arnall, Julia Thomas, Jenny Jones,
Chelsea Davies, Sam Teare
Accountant - Luke Howson
Administration - Andrew Goodman



Connect For Life

Visiting Speakers & Facilitators

Whether it's belly dancing, Bentley 'driving', soprano singing, totem drumming, lizard stroking, storytelling, laughing, clay workshop-ping, rickshaw riding and more - we've had a lot of fun this year!

Thank you to all of our visitors throughout the year who brought something different and special to each of our sessions...

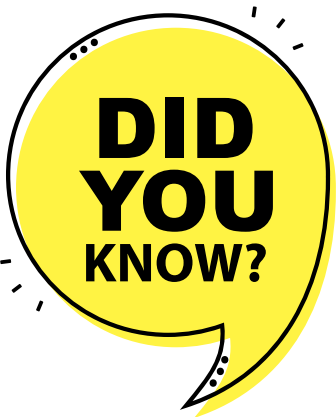
Andy Young, Animal Encounters, Bellan House Yr 5 Choir, Belly Up, Border Men, Caroline Coulman, Chris Jennings, Clare Harrison, Exotic Zoo, Graham Mitchell, High Sheriff of Shropshire - Mandy Thorn, Reverend Jacob Molyneux, Jake Evans Storyteller, Jay Moore, John Edwards, Lanyon Bowdler, Mark Hignett, Mayor of Oswestry - Olly Rose, Of One Accord, Nicely Out of Tune, Orthopaedic Male Voice Choir, Richard and Emma Peace, Totem Drumming, Young At Heart, Vicky Ware



Dementia & Memory Loss in the UK

Why our work continues to be important

**Statistics sourced from Alzheimers.org*



**DID
YOU
KNOW?**

A report in 2019, commissioned by Alzheimer's Society from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), set out estimates for the number of people with dementia and the cost of dementia care in the UK with projections to 2040.

The report found there are currently around 900,000 people with dementia in the UK. This is projected to rise to 1.6 million people by 2040.



**DID
YOU
KNOW?**



**DID
YOU
KNOW?**

209,600 people will develop dementia this year, that's one every three minutes.

It is estimated that 70 per cent of people in care homes have dementia or severe memory problems. It is estimated that 60 per cent of people who draw on support from home-care are people living with dementia.



**DID
YOU
KNOW?**

Connect For Life Thank You!



With the support and donations from local and national organisations and individuals, Connect For Life has been able to grow and thrive - a massive thank you for your continued support.

 **Lanyon Bowdler**
SOLICITORS



Rotary
Club of Oswestry Cambrian 

The Crafty Knitters

Trefonen Hill Walk

Edgerley Tractor Run

Barley Mow Pub Lunch Group

A special thanks to all individual donors, fundraisers, and regular supporters!

Also, we would like to once again send out a big thank you to everyone who has helped us at our events including Gatacre Pavilion.

Connect For Life

Camaraderie & Laughter

“

Volunteering for CFL is very rewarding. Being part of a dedicated, energetic proactive team of people who are all prepared to share ideas, skills and knowledge to provide stimulating sessions for our service users is gratifying

The preparatory work for, quizzes, poems, crafts, discussion pointers, PowerPoints and games undertaken by the volunteers for the Thursday sessions which this year have included, music, the night, France, hobbies, jobs, autumn etc. plus, the various events; the death of Queen Elizabeth, the coronation of King Charles and CFLs 7th Birthday, is always worthwhile when witnessing the service users' banter, chatter, laughter, smiles, competitiveness and camaraderie. Talking to service users on a 1:1 basis and learning about their life's narrative, places life in perspective and provides a wealth of information to enable stimulating relevant interactions. The year has seen several externally sourced music sessions all have been great fun and all-inclusive with dancing, singing and playing musical instruments re-energising our service users and reviving memories.

As a Volunteer the year has been varied, enjoyable, stimulating and at times sad as we see service users move on whilst others are welcomed into the group.

Thank you CFL for providing an excellent forum for the support of persons with memory loss.

Rosy Davidson - a volunteer



Connect For Life

Contact Us

If you are interested in the work that **Connect For Life** does and want to find out more, please contact us via the following . . .



77 Oakhurst Road, Oswestry, SY11 1BL



07582 207972



www.connectforlife.co.uk



connectforlife@hotmail.com



You can also keep up to date with all our latest news and events by visiting our Facebook page - www.facebook.co.uk/connectforlife or www.facebook.co.uk/activecogs



How can you help us?

- We are always on the look-out for **volunteers**. Come and join a friendly team. Contact us for more details.
- **Like and Share** both our Connect For Life and Active Cogs pages on Facebook.
- **Fundraise** - your kind donations help us to continue delivering the great work that Connect For Life does week by week.
- **Gift in Memory** - if you are writing your will, you might be interested in supporting us. Ask us for more details.